HOW I BEND INTO MORE

A LONG POEM

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By
Tea Gerbeza

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Coordinator, MFA in Writing
University of Saskatchewan
Department of English
Arts Building, Room 319
9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5 Canada

OR

Dean
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
University of Saskatchewan
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9 Canada

ABSTRACT

Centered in my disabled experience, my long poem, *How I Bend Into More*, explores the intersections of the disabled body and poetic form. Formal choices in my poem are tied to my disabled experience. White space, shape, photopoetry (composed from scanner photographs of paper-quilled anatomy), and image-text all work to pull my existence from the margins to the center. My poem performs the physical image of my body as I undergo a journey of repair from ableism and self-inflicted pain. *How I Bend Into More* is a long-poem articulation of a restoration of the self and the body writing itself into selfhood.

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DEDICATION

for my younger self

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ARTIST STATEMENT

I was diagnosed with idiopathic scoliosis when I was five years old. Four years earlier, my parents and I immigrated to Canada from the former Yugoslavia because of civil war. As I grew up in my new country, I developed a love for reading. I became an avid reader, but I never found a character who showed me a body I could recognize; instead, I read stories that implicitly taught me to desire a "normal" body. And even though I learned how to present as able-bodied, in private I obsessed over the ways my body was different from the bodies in my favourite books. Years of being entrenched in the limiting perceptions of what makes a body desirable, or "normal," left a deep well in me where internalized ableism made its home.

Disability poetics, or "crip poetics," is interested in the intersections of the disabled body and poetic form. As Jim Ferris writes, "[t]he body is not just an important image *in* poetry, it is also an important image *of* poetry" ("The Enjambed Body" 219; emphasis original). *How I Bend Into More* is a long-poem articulation of the body writing itself into selfhood. Rather than exist in the margins (as I have for most of my life), I center my disabled experience and articulate an identity for myself, which is one of the primary characterizations of crip poetics. Every formal choice in my long poem—experimentation with white space, shape, photopoetry, image-text—is tied to my disabled experience. In his essay "Crip Poetry, Or How I Learned to Love the Limp," Ferris states that disability poetry can be characterized by the following: "a challenge to stereotypes and an insistence on self-definition; foregrounding of the perspective of people with disabilities; an emphasis on embodiment, especially atypical embodiment; and alternative techniques and poetics" ("Crip Poetry"). *How I Bend Into More* takes its cues from Ferris' poetics, and an insistence for self-definition permeates my long poem, even when the speaker grapples with her internalized ableism. This self-definition is most notable in the narrative arc of

paper quilling and the body. My long poem begins with an embodied action of the speaker on her bed, eyes closed, bending over to feel her own body: "my fingertips my mirrors / trace the crescent / overlap of skin over / skin: an unsolved space" (4). The idea of skin as an "unsolved space" points to an imposed ableist conception where the non-normative body is something the speaker needs to "solve;" however, my long poem does not attempt to "solve" the body. What develops instead is a desire to listen to "my body's rotational dynamics another language / wanting to be opened / to belong to me" (5). This yearning for ownership of identity foregrounds *How I Bend Into More*'s narrative. My poem offers up fragments of moments and of selves throughout my life, and unites them into a self-defined identity. Additionally, *How I Bend Into More* emphasizes an atypical embodiment (Ferris "Crip Poetry") through the formal traits of the long poem.

The visual shape of my poem represents the physical shape of my body. My long poem's most prevalent shape is the line composed of hyphens that are centered vertical on the page. This hyphenated or "dotted" vertical line begins *How I Bend Into More* with an "x" at the top to signal a beginning. The "dotted" vertical line signifies multiple motifs: "a cut line / a fold line / a stitching / a thread / a surgical trace line / a suture / a scar / a spine" (3). Finally, the vertical line also represents the shape that doctors and surgeons desired to fix my spine into: a straight normative spine, one devoid of curve. This desire stems from the medical model's view of disability. As Eli Clare notes, "[t]he medical model of disability defines disability as a medical problem located in individual bodies and frames those problems as curable, or at least treatable, by the medical-industrial complex; in essence giving doctors complete authority over the embodied experiences of disabled people" ("Resisting Easy Answers"). I required a spinal fusion because my curvature was so severe that my spine was beginning to reshape my rib cage, which

started a process whereby my lungs and heart were being crushed. While the fusion saved my life, the surgeon could not fully straighten my spine, leaving me with a forty-five-degree curvature; therefore, I was not "cured." By structuring the lines of the poem around this vertical line, I am writing over this ableist imposition, and the expectation that my spinal fusion was a cure for my scoliosis; instead, the poetic line sinuously wraps around the vertical line and, in turn, curves it. Additionally, the dotted vertical line creates a binary; however, this binary is false. The wrapped poetic line blurs the binary because neither side of the vertical line can be read without the other. This blurring and twisting of the vertical line reiterates a breakage from normative structures reflective of the medical model of disability's aim to contort the body to fit the norm. The inspiration for the dotted line came after reading Daniel Scott Tysdal's *MAD Fold-In Poems* (a chapbook about a person's experience with depression).

The form of *MAD Fold-In Poems* was inspired by Al Jaffee's fold-in illustrations inside the back cover of MAD Magazine, where Tysdal borrows the fold-in technique to reveal a punchline (Tysdal 36). As Tysdal explains, "the MAD fold-in poem is characterized by three features: 1) the poem does not end at the bottom of the page, 2) the reader completes the poem by making two vertical folds in the page, and 3) these folds reveal the final line of the poem nested within the original lines" (36). The "fold-in" version of the final line is printed after each poem. As I write in my review of Tysdal's book, "[t]he book's form communicates that through the action of folding in, what is inside the bodymind is folded 'out.' Through this 'folding out,' the speaker can face what is inside them and create something from the findings. … Poetry, then, becomes a tool in unwrapping what's within, but it is the physicality of the fold-in that revives" ("Lining Our Lives"). Through Tysdal's "folding out" what is within, I found a way to conceptualize my vertical line. While my vertical line is not explicitly a line to fold, it prompts

the reader to cut the page to see what is revealed. My vertical line is more than just a line; it is also a kind of mirror and, should someone cut the page in half, a doubled self—much like the other self in the "Parallel" segments. The vertical line also enacts a stitching that can reunite and reconnect the cut pages and selves. This reconnection is explicit when there is "a meeting / a finding" (106) along the vertical line, which then leads into the last movement of my long poem where the union of the disparate selves come together in "The Art of Paper Quilling" (107).

The next most prevalent form in my long poem are the petal-shaped sections. This shape represents my body in its hunched form, a brace, or a belly filling with air. The petal is also reminiscent of a literal paper petal from the larger paper rose body on page 85. Verse and image converge to represent my "curledbodypetal" "ripping and waking" (85) from my liminal state of life and death. The association of paper with the body is essential in *How I Bend Into More* because the articulation of self happens most overtly within the paper quilling narrative. The text on the petals of the paper rose (85) is from my mother's explanation of her experience during my surgery; the subsequent scanograph (86) is from the same text, but cut, rearranged and reordered. I included my mother's memory to have, as Travis Chi Wing Lau outlines, "an appreciation of the pain of others that opens up new crip models of care that can truly cater to pain's queer forms. This appreciation is a relinquishing of perfect knowing, a cripistemology that remains vulnerably open to being unable to fully access … another's pain but still honouring it" ("The Crip Poetics"). In many points throughout *How I Bend Into More*, the speaker and her mother share intimate moments with underlying pain—of which neither can be fully understood by the other. For example, the mother cannot understand the speaker's bodily pain and the speaker cannot understand the mother's pain of surviving the Yugoslavian Civil War, then having her daughter undergo a spinal fusion. The words on the petals of the paper rose enact a connection

between the two different experiences of pain while also highlighting the simultaneity of the shared event of the surgery. My mother believes that my scoliosis resulted from my breeched birth. This belief links my condition to her, as if it were her fault. She also believes that my surgery was worse for her than the war (another repeated echo throughout the long poem), which is something I still struggle to comprehend. How could anything be worse than war? In the radical unknowability of each other's pain, my mother and I bond.

Through its long extending lines in a significant amount of white space, the last formal shape in *How I Bend Into More* resembles paper strips. The section that fully embodies this paper strip form is "The Art of Paper Quilling" (107). "The Art of Paper Quilling" replicates the look of paper strips with one-line stanzas that invite the reader to envision the piece as cut strips, which can be used to create something new. "The Art of Paper Quilling" marks a shift in the manuscript as I take the ableism I have endured and center my experience to build toward resistance, acceptance and self-love. Because of the physical "strip" form of the poem, the "building" could be made physical should someone cut the lines up into strips and quill the strips into designs; in fact, that is exactly what I do to make the paper-quilled spine in the poem's closing image: I make both the speaker and the reader look at my body as the final act (the action the speaker has been unwilling or unable to do throughout the poem). The section echoes key phrases from "Clearing Up the Question of Why it Takes Me So Long to Get Ready in the Morning" (8) like "flesh mountains" and "hate walls," and turns them into ingredients for bending into more (113). "The Art of Paper Quilling" (107) gathers all the selves from the manuscript (and in many ways, from my life up until now) and honours them for keeping me alive, despite the pain and trauma caused by ableism. Here, the "image *of* poetry" (Ferris "The Enjambed Body" 219), or the body, is the physical strip that I, the paper-quilling self, take and

create from. The form on the page throughout my long poem becomes the identity of the speaker. Put differently, *How I Bend Into More*'s form stands in for identity as the speaker rebuilds her selfhood. It is the long poem form that allows all of these different embodiments of my crip poetics and articulation of selfhood to exist.

When embarking on this project, the long poem was the only form that gave me the necessary space I needed to explore the enormity of the experience and time span I wanted to cover. In its continuation, resistance of closure, and capacity to map a journey, the long poem form was essential to *How I Bend Into More*'s trajectory of moving the disabled, othered body into a position of "empowered visibility" (Schumer "Finding Communion"). As Uri S. Cohen and Michael Golson assert, long poems "handle long events" (2). *How I Bend Into More*'s life events are immense and continue beyond the last page as I continue to live. As Emilia Nielsen writes, poetry as a genre "provides a space for the deeply subjective articulation of experiential knowledge" ("Chronically Ill, Critically Crip"). I would argue that the long poem, specifically, provides an even larger terrain for this articulation of experiential knowledge, as the form is not limited to discrete poems, but rather, is composed of connected segments to make a whole. The long poem is a lingering. It is a form that allows for the "necessary range in which to articulate the poem's central truth from various and variable angles and perspectives" (Mckinnon 368). *How I Bend Into More*'s "central truth" is that I needed time and space to confront my internalized ableism and forgive myself for it—to articulate my selfhood on my own terms.

The long poem genre offers crip poetics an even wider scope to discover "new knowledge about disability" (Garland-Thomson "The Story of My Work") through an extended meditation on one's disabled experience. I thought I knew so much about my body when I was in my late teens and earlier twenties that I stopped listening to my body's needs. I kept pushing my

body beyond its boundaries until that pain became louder and more expressive. Long poems have the space to attend to "pain's languages and forms, its poetics" (Lau "The Crip Poetics"), and the ability to send echoes that ripple throughout the poem, calling the reader back to a moment or detail (Ondaatje 14), which then builds and "show[s] a process of knowledge, of discovery" (13). One such discovery and "pain language" that manifested in *How I Bend Into More* was the period (as a punctuation mark) as code for pain. Nielsen states that "poetry written out of crip experience is the mode of poetics that explicitly engages with innovative or experimental techniques" ("Chronically Ill, Critically Crip"). This coding that I do throughout the long poem with the period and the parentheses illustrates an engagement with experimental techniques. When I first introduce pain as a period mark, I tell the reader that "these marked echoes . . . . / punctuate my movement … my body's speech … the grammar of self" (10). In doing so, the reader interprets the period throughout the long poem as more than just a punctuation mark—it will signify how pain is present in the body as a period is present in a complete sentence. Sometimes as prominent as a full line of dots, and at other times as simple as one puncture, the period in *How I Bend Into More* operates beyond the conventions of grammar. The parentheses operate in a similar way: the marks are "a / Boston Brace / a parentheses / around my spine / a curve / an aside / remaining open / a spine" (11). The parentheses now function not only as signaling asides, as they do in grammar, but also as a brace that constricts the body. When a single parenthesis shows up in the text, it signals an opening that remains open, a perpetual extending, a continuing. Both periods and parentheses challenge normative modes of perception and reading. *How I Bend Into More* forges its own grammar of embodiment as a recuperative act.

Long poems also have the capacity to become multiple-book life poems. Robert Kroetsch defines the long poem as "[t]he continuing poem: not the having written, but the *writing*. The poem as long as a life" (311; emphasis original). This notion of a poem as long as a life feels fundamentally crip to me as it centers the act of writing, which for many disabled and chronically ill people happens in "crip time"—writing that takes place in a flexible time frame apart from the normative one (Samuels "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time"). Put differently, my understanding of crip time is that I work in tune with my body and its daily state; that is, I have to incorporate rest into my writing practice, which then means my projects take a long period of time to complete. "[*C*]*rip time is writing time*," Ellen Samuels writes and states, "I have been writing an essay about crip time, *in* crip time for so many years now" ("Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time"; emphasis original). Like Samuels, I have been writing (in various ways) *How I Bend Into More* for almost ten years. In her article "Chronic Poetics, Chronic Illness: Reading Tory Dent's HIV Poetry through Disability Poetics and Feminist Bioethics," Ally Day identifies how Dent creates an intertextuality between her two collections *HIV, Mon Amour* and *Black Milk*: "In her 2005 collection of poetry, *Black Milk*, Dent dedicates the title poem of the collection, 'in memory of 'HIV, mon amour''—demanding an intertextual reading of the two poems" (89). By demanding an intertextual reading of the two poems, Dent "deconstruct[s] … boundaries through intentional intertextuality, a six-year-long white space opens. Reading 'Black Milk,' we can understand that not only do Dent's lines bleed into one another, but by using intertextual techniques in the collection itself, so do her poetry collections" (92). This "six-year-long white space" signals to me a prompting to linger in that space, to use it as a place of possibility, imagining, and dreaming in crip time. The white space also points to a continuing that uses "poetry to uncover spaces of unknowing" (92). Dent is not the only poet who uses this

kind of intertextuality; Roxanna Bennett, Tommy Pico, and Catherine Graham do as well, although not as overtly as Dent does.

Intertextuality between books opens "spaces of unknowing" that can help reimagine possible futures. Bennett's *The Untranslatable I* continues with themes also present in *Unmeaningable* such as their intentional cripping of myths and their blending invisible and visible disability identities; however, *The Untranslatable I* has a more personal approach as it uses a trip to Europe as the lens through which the cripping of myths and exploration of disability identity takes place. Pico's *IRL*, *Nature Poem*, *Junk*, and *Feed* all follow "Teebs" in their journey through life, linking each book's focus to each other. Graham traces her breast cancer experience in *The Celery Forest* and explores her cancer narrative across generations in *Aether: An Out-of-Body Lyric*. These texts intersect with one another in ways that illustrate an engagement with speculation and those spaces of unknowing, similar to what Lau notes crip poetics does: crip poetics "engag[es] in its own capacious project of speculation into more inclusive and accessible futures" ("The Crip Poetics"). I want to say and explore so much that didn't fit into *How I Bend Into More*, so I know the books I intend to write after this one will be intertextual, creating a polyphony across books.

The long poem genre, in its inherent looping and echoing capacities, creates space for acts of witness and resistance. Christina Scheuer notes that "disability poetics writes disability from inside the body, and the poem is necessarily structured by the poet's daily lived experience, with its attendant political and social contexts" (157). Even in the moments found in sections like "(Still)" (96) where there are voices that aren't the speaker's, *How I Bend Into More*'s disability poetics center the speaker's own experience. In "(Still)" (96), while the dialogue is derived from things in my past that have been said to me, they are recalled from my memory and therefore

exemplify both the "political and social contexts" (Scheuer 157). Moments like those in "(Still)" are an example of a direct confrontation with the ableism that has burrowed inside my body. Ending the segment "(Still)" with "I'm really fucking tired / of sorry" (97) overtly refuses "compulsory able-bodiedness." As Nielsen states, "we have a collective responsibility to refuse compulsory able-bodiedness, and I am buoyed in witnessing instances of resistance" ("Chronically Ill, Critically Crip"). My long poem form allows me to witness my own instances of resistance, which are present most notably in the photopoetry narrative composed of the scanographs of my paper quilling.

Paper quilling and the long poem intersect well because they both build from smaller pieces. Paper quilling is the art of rolling paper strips and pinching the rolled strip into various designs. It is an art form, like the long poem, that takes a significant amount of time to create. When I started to write this long poem, it became clear to me that I needed to incorporate paper quilling (and paper roses) as another language for how I understood my body. The long poem became a kind of long strip of paper I was rolling and pinching into various shapes. *How I Bend Into More*'s "shapes" or "pieces" are the fragmented moments and selves within each labelled "segment"—or "movement" as I like to call them—which is why I added subheadings to each "movement" of the poem: to signal a new place to roll different shapes. After viewing Laura Ferguson's *Visible Skeleton* series—drawings of Ferguson's scoliotic body in various positions—I knew a visual component to the poem was essential. Ferguson writes that this series was an "investigation of [her] own body and its unusual anatomy" ("The Story Behind the Art"). Seeing these drawings, particularly "Crouching Figure with Visible Skeleton," I was moved to tears—I finally saw the familiar crouched position my own body made. Ferguson states that "it was powerful and emotional to draw my scar, my deformity—giving myself permission to

explore territory I had long kept private" ("The Story Behind the Art"). This power Ferguson discusses was something I wanted for myself, too, because only writing about my experience didn't feel like enough after spending the majority of my life being told how deformed I *looked*, how hunched. Peer ridicule always focused on my visual appearance. I wanted to feel what Ferguson did drawing her own scoliotic spine and scar as a way to give myself permission to explore those parts of me. I paper-quilled my scoliotic spine (106) using "S-scrolls" and "C-scrolls," which mirror the terminology used to describe different scoliosis curvatures. Scoliosis curvatures are commonly known through their letter shapes: "s-shaped curve" when there is a double curvature in the spine, or "c-shaped" when the curve is only on one side of the spine (usually to the right). I made the paper-quilled spine's length the length of my scar to connect it to my spinal fusion. Touching the scrolls as I rolled them and creating this paper-quilled spine piece by piece turned into my own version of an embrace, an acceptance, a friendship with my body. I knew this was a monumental moment in *How I Bend Into More*, so I focused the visual narrative to build toward when the paper-quilled spine takes center stage and then blends into my body with the final photograph. This paper-quilling narrative is the physical embodiment of the articulation of the self on my own terms.

In much of my teenage writing about my body, surgery was framed as the cure for these "s-shaped" and "c-shaped" curves; however, the concept of cure assumes that there is a nondisabled being that exists. It assumes that, as Clare asserts, "we can defeat or transcend body-mind conditions through individual hard work" (*Brilliant Imperfection* 10). The tenets of cure become tangled because, Clare emphasizes, "an original nondisabled being doesn't exist" (15). When I was younger, I couldn't envision a "cured" image of my body because I didn't know what that might look like. I still don't. There is no "original" me that doesn't have scoliosis. *How*

I Bend Into More addresses this conception of "cure" through a direct refusal of it in "Parallel": "Our scar / offers me this beginning: / us without *S*" (104). "Our scar" becomes the parallel self that is offering a "cured" future without scoliosis. The speaker, however, refuses: "No. / I want this:" (104). Following this declaration, the long poem moves into the final act of forgiveness with the image of my paper-quilled spine (105). This paper spine propels the speaker into using the vocabulary and etymology of paper quilling as a new language for her body, which makes the speaker keep her previous pact to "use touch for answers" (5). In "(12 AM on the ninth anniversary of my spinal fusion" (115), the speaker finally uses touch as knowledge and forgiveness when the line "forgiveness looks like this" (115) moves into the photograph of my back with a paper strip running parallel to my scar (116); the verse then goes through motions of the speaker touching parts of her body. The quilled body illustrates the body writing itself into selfhood.

The images of the paper-quilling were created with scanography (scanner photography). Scanography is "the process of capturing images using a flatbed scanner with a CCD (charge-coupled device) array capturing device" (ValDelinder "So What"). Items—which are the subject of the photograph—are laid on the glass platen and the image is made from the item ("So What"). Scanography, in its definition, seemed so technical, almost medical, that I felt like I was giving myself an x-ray. The use of technology—in this case the scanner—was a way into the interior of my spine that I never had the chance to experience before. Ferguson also notes that she felt that her x-rays "belong[ed] more to the doctors than to [her]" ("The Story Behind the Art"). For this reason, the scanography acted as a reclamation of my body and the image of my body from the doctors and surgeons. The majority of the traditional photographs in the manuscript are all of the same visual: me standing with my back toward the camera; this is

because the only way I can actually see my back for myself is through a reflection: a photograph, a mirror, someone else's gaze. My first back photograph was captured by a webcam in 2011 (20); the next in 2015 (28); and the last in the final image of the long poem (119).

The final photograph in my long poem represents the fragmented self becoming whole. In "The Visible Skeleton Series: The Art of Laura Ferguson," Alice Domurat Dreger describes how Laura Ferguson's "Crouching Figure with Visible Skeleton" externalizes her curved spine, stating, "[Ferguson] literally bring[s] to the surface of her body that which is necessarily prominent in her being – but that which is normally invisible and therefore, at some level, unspeakable" (161). Dreger highlights the problem of having an "invisible" condition: the condition is often left out of the conversation. The photograph that ends the long poem is an echo of those first two that were taken during a time in my life when I was still harbouring ableist views about myself. However, this image is different than the first iterations because now I am in an intimate place (my bedroom), crouching on my bed with the paper-quilled spine over my back. Through the difference in position, the place the photograph is taken, and the inclusion of the paper-quilled spine, I am centering my experience and moving it into the conversation. The narrative build of the images goes from fragmentation to wholeness, like the text does; this process demonstrates a foregrounding of the self-articulated body, while also showing that the images are integral to the lyric. The images are not ornamental or decorative or supplemental; rather, they are an integral part of the poem that can be read on their own as a kind of "stanza," which also work in conversation with and alongside the poem.

When I inserted the images within my long poem, I knew I wanted them to be essential, so that if the images were removed, the poem could no longer exist as fully. This is how Garry Fabian Miller and Lavinia Greenlaw's *Thoughts of a Night Sea* treats the images alongside the

poems. Visually, Miller's images look like a blue, watery light coming out of a black background similar to my scanographs. The images are light, water, and dye deconstruction prints. Miller's images are necessary to the meaning of the poems and vice versa. For example, Greenlaw's poem "Anchor" ends with an open line that invites the reader to read the image as its own line: "Yourself in the dark still, / the gaze steady / while" (*Thoughts of a Night Sea*). The image that follows is of a bright white line with light blue edges coming out of a deep black depth. By ending the poem with "while," Greenlaw invites the reader to treat the image as the next line. This treatment of image *as* the following line suggests that the speaker's gaze is steady while they watch the light slowly emerge from a dense blackness of the sea (or of the night). The title of the book, *Thoughts of a Night Sea*, further adds a layer, suggesting that this light in the image is also the sea's thoughts coming to the surface. The way the images in *Thoughts of a Night Sea* become lines in the poems inspired me to do the same in *How I Bend Into More*. For example, in the segment "Surgery" (29), the verse ends on "bone" and the following image communicates the bone turning into a paper strip (30). Image and text collaboration is prominent in photopoetry.

Photopoetry, Michael Nott asserts, is "a form of photo-text that takes, for its primary components, poetry and photography" (3). The photopoem is a product of a retrospective or collaborative process between a poet and photographer or a sole poet-photographer (3). Self-collaborative photopoetry, however, "is uncommon" and "the 'trickiest' to discuss, given questions surrounding the sole artist's potential privileging of one medium over another" (7). In this definition of self-collaborative photopoetry, the potential for what self-collaborative work adds to the discourse on photopoetry is lost because of the rare attention paid to it. I don't believe the possible privileging of mediums should deter discussions around how images and text can

make meaningful reading experiences, even if one medium is used more than the other. The focus should be on the collaboration between poem and photo, and *How I Bend Into More* certainly falls into this self-collaborative category. The photopoems in the long poem relate more to the photopoetry category than visual poetry because visual poetry is defined to be "poetry meant to be seen" (Bohn 13). While my images could be read as visual poetry, it is the reliance on the collaboration, the reading into and out of the poetry that distinguishes it as photopoetry. My photopoetry makes manifest what the speaker asks for in the beginning of the long poem: for "my body's rotational dynamics / … to belong to me / … for forgiveness" (5-6). Lau explains that "[d]isability poetics creates a collective experience of shared uncertainty, of contingency in the face of disability's vicissitudes" ("The Crip Poetics"). Through all the various mediums working within the long poem, I highlight the vicissitudes of my disabled experience.

At its core, *How I Bend Into More* is about forgiveness. The final section, "(12 AM on the ninth anniversary of my spinal fusion" (115), is a direct echo that loops back to the beginning of the long poem; however, because no closing parenthesis appears in this iteration, the section signifies an unbracing, a freedom. This section solidifies the theme of forgiveness, which is why it is the last major movement in my long poem before the line "a quilled curve / I" (118) and the photograph of me with the paper-quilled spine covering my scar. Upon closer look, the form of "(12 AM on the ninth anniversary of my spinal fusion" (115) varies slightly from "The Art of Paper Quilling" (107). The one-line stanzas are closer together, and there is less white space around them. This closeness represents a gathering, a coming together of the different selves in order to "begin again" (117) as a new, whole, self. The journey to self-love exists in the movements of the hands over the body, and in the lines physically coming closer together. The one-line stanzas in "(12 AM on the ninth anniversary of my spinal fusion*"* (115) could still be

cut into paper strips and these strips could be formed and reformed into anything. With this potential for forming and reforming, a reminder emerges: paper will always have a curve and so will I. Forgiveness manifests in the act of looking at myself once again, crouched in the final photograph. The speaker is again in front of the mirror like she was in "Clearing Up the Question of Why it Takes Me So Long to Get Ready in the Morning" (8). Now, however, both the speaker and the reader are invited to look, to linger on all the curves of my body and paper-quilled spine. My long poem becomes the physical image of my body, and the formal journey of my body is collected in the "S-scroll" and "C-scroll" quilled shapes that compose the paper-quilled spine. The long poem enacts a restoration of the self and body.

Texts focused on scoliosis and scoliosis-related disabilities are rare in contemporary Canadian literature. Poetry texts are even rarer. *How I Bend Into More* will be one of the first. Of the books I did find on scoliosis, the majority are American: Judy Blume's *Deenie*, Alison Gerber's *Braced*, Patricia Horvath's *All the Difference*, and Lau's *Bone Setter*. *Deenie* and *Braced* follow similar narratives of a pre-teen protagonist wearing a brace to "fix" their curvatures. These kind of cure narratives are prominent in scoliosis-specific literature as they treat scoliosis like a cage, a thing apart from the self that treats the brace as a fix-all. I grew up believing these ableist narratives about my disabled body, and when my brace and surgery did not "fix" me, I endured unrelenting internalized ableism. The lack of literary representation failed me. It wasn't until a year ago when I found Lau's chapbook, *Bone Setter,* that I finally felt a kinship with someone who also shared an experience with scoliosis-related disability. Lau writes that "[c]rip poetry has taught me how to imagine futures with bodies like mine thriving in it" ("The Crip Poetics"). Similarly, crip poetry has taught me how to think about my meditations on my body. I am grateful to disability culture for this teaching. According to Ferris, "with its

attention to alternative ways of being in the world, crip poetry seeks to redefine what it means to have and be a body in the world" (Ferris "Crip Poetry"). *How I Bend Into More* contributes to these alternative ways of being in the world. My writing also extends—with its multimodal experimentation—to other art forms beyond itself to paper quilling, paper art, photography and scanography. This extension demonstrates the different ways the body can write itself into selfhood. Lau states that the crip form "models the work of *cohabitation* with disability and chronic illness as *kin*" ("Pain, My Kin"; emphasis original). While I still grapple with ableism, I am developing a kinship with my body by forgiving myself for my past ableist perceptions and self-inflicted pain, and by listening deeper to my body's needs. My hope is that *How I Bend Into More* becomes the meditation someone else needs.

Tea Gerbeza
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Access is important to me. To keep my long poem as accessible as possible, image descriptions can be found in the “Notes” section in the order that the images appear in the text.